

A Case Study of the Cross-Cultural Performance of *The Tale of Tsuru*

— How American Students Performed a Japanese Play in English
Across the Gap of the Language and Culture —

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Summary

This thesis is a case study of the cross-cultural performance of *The Tale of Tsuru*. In this thesis, I analyze how American students performed a Japanese play in English across the gap of the language and culture.

I studied in the Theatre Department of Western Michigan University in the autumn and winter semesters in 2001. Then I took part in the main stage production of *The Tale of Tsuru* as an actor and a consultant on Japan. In the process of rehearsals, directors, actors, and other staff members struggled to present this cross-cultural performance, and it consequently succeeded after trial and error. I consider the reasons for the success of the performance from the points of view of “translations and rewritings” and “direction.”

In Chapter 1, I introduce the background of *The Tale of Tsuru*. In Chapter 2, I focus on “translation and rewriting,” and discuss the process of literal translation from Japanese to English. I examine the differences of theatrical style, restructuring and insertions as rewriting from literal English to understandable English. In Chapter 3, I consider direction from the aspect of movement-based acting such as

Commedia dell'arte and performance with masks. I also consider aspects of Japanese behavior and staging and find the characteristics of the stage of this performance in style and feature. Finally, I focus on the Japanese traditional culture introduced in the show, such as poems, songs and rituals.

Overview of the Play

As a young man, Yasuhide became a well-known painter in the capital. There he finds a beautiful princess whom he runs away with back to his homeland. As he flees from the capital he is attacked, and the princess is stolen away from him. He pleads with a crane in a marsh to return his lost love. The crane grants him his wish.

Sixteen years pass since Yasuhide's and Princess Sakaki's wedding, and he now lives with his mother, wife and their two children. He is now a poor farmer and is unable to paint. His son, Jiro, begins to develop his talent as a painter, and although the villagers praise him, Yasuhide objects. The local administrator falls in love with Yasuhide's daughter and demands a painting of a flame and a cloth made of crane's feathers in order to ensure the village's protection.

The local administrator's mother knows that Yasuhide was the original artist of this painting. She agrees to allow the marriage of her son to Yasuhide's daughter Chigusa providing someone can produce the painting and the cloth.

Chigusa gradually begins to love the local administrator and tries desperately to weave the unique cloth with her mother's help. As she tries to weave, she feels as if she herself is turning into a crane. Hearing that Yasuhide could paint better if he were to see a real flame, the local administrator's mother orders Yasuhide's house to be set on fire. Jiro is caught in the burning flames and Sakaki tries to rescue him. She transforms herself into a beautiful crane and leaves them.

Introduction

I have been involved with performances in English for ten years in Japan. In the process of performing American plays, I have practiced the pronunciation of English and American gestures and ways of behavior. Moreover, I studied American culture and history in order to portray the American characters. It is

always hard for me to portray American characters because I am Japanese and do not share their language and culture.

Therefore, when I took part in *The Tale of Tsuru*, I wondered whether it could be possible for American students to perform a cross-cultural performance between Japan and America across the gap of the language and culture. However, it consequently succeeded. There are three reasons why the American production of *The Tale of Tsuru* succeeded in bridging the gap of language and culture.

One reason is that Williams, the playwright of the English script, clearly grasped the thematic spirit of the original Japanese script. In the process of making an English script, she rewrote the original play that had been translated literally. She restructured the scenes and inserted some dialogue into the original script. Consequently, the play became understandable and attractive for American audiences without diminishing the value of the original version.

Another reason is that the directors successfully used gestures and movement in the English production. Comparing the style of the Eastern and Western theatre, we find that the former is movement-based and the latter is language-based. In the American production of *The Tale of Tsuru*, the directors adapted some of the techniques of Commedia dell'arte and used masks, in order to focus on gestures and movements. This movement-based direction was effective in representing the characteristics of Japanese theatre.

The other reason is that the use of traditional Japanese culture characterized this performance. Japanese haiku poems, songs and rituals were technically and appropriately introduced in the show. They represented the Japanese quality of "elegant simplicity," and it this cross-cultural performance seems to have fascinated the American audience.

Chapter 1. The Play

*The Tale of Tsuru*¹⁾ was originally written and directed by Michiko Kondo. It was presented by the Kureha High School Drama Club at the Lied Center in Lincoln, Nebraska as a part of the International Thespian Festival in 1999. Kondo was inspired by several traditional stories in Japan and wrote this play as a medley of their plots. The basic idea of this play came from *Kudzuno-ha* (a kudzu vine

leaf)²⁾ a story of the traditional Japanese theatre, Kabuki. Kondo also adapted the plot of *Ryujin Densetsu* (the traditional legend of the dragon) from Toyama, Japan, and the well-known fairy tale, *Tsuru no Ongaeshi* (The Gratitude of Tsuru). Also, the episode in which a painter sets a house on fire in order to draw a picture came from *Jigokuhen* (a book of hell)³⁾ written by Ryunosuke Akutagawa.

Allison Williams, a playwright and teacher at Western Michigan University (WMU), adapted and translated the play for the English language premiere. She directed this new Japanese show along with co-director Todd Esperand for the spring production of the Theatre Department at WMU in 2001.⁴⁾ I took part in this performance as an actor and consultant on Japan.

Chapter 2. Translation and Rewriting

Translation and rewriting were the first step for the American production of *The Tale of Tsuru* in English. Translation is necessary to bridge the language gap, and rewriting is important to bridge the cultural gap. Williams, who adapted the play into English, suggested that a translator must make a choice, either “you reserve the original author’s intent for every single line, or you bring the spirit of a piece to a new audience.”

Haruki Murakami, a novelist and translator, talks about his translation work in an interview. His most important suggestion is that a translator must be confident that he/she can capture the theme of the story. He says, “If you do not have confidence, it does not matter how much effort you make to be a good linguist and writer” (42).

Williams made the best of both choices, taking the thematic spirit of the original script and producing a new American version with it. She said, “I believe I have done my own creative work without diminishing Mrs. Kondo’s creative work.” Two steps of completing the English script — literal translation from Japanese to English and rewriting from literal English to English that is understandable on stage — were necessary for the success of the cross-cultural performance of *The Tale of Tsuru*.

2.1. Literal Translation: From Japanese to English

In the production of *The Tale of Tsuru*, the first step was to translate the original Japanese play into English. Williams said, "With Japanese, it was very hard to make the jump [to English]. The culture is so alien and the language would be." At the beginning, she decided to hire a native speaker of Japanese to translate the original Japanese script literally into English. However, there were many barriers in the process of literal translation because of the characteristics of the Japanese language. According to Donahue, attributes of rule-oriented Asian cultures are certainly reflected in the use of language honorifics. He mentions that Japanese honorifics include several separate systems including terms denoting superior/inferior social states, respectful terms of address, and "beautification" terms for certain objects (134) .

A name suffix is one kind of honorifics. There are many kinds of name suffixes in Japanese, and it is very complicated to use them. The choices of name suffixes are different according to circumstances. For example, - *San* is moderately honorific, used for children to their parents and adult friends to each other. - *Sama* is a higher level of politeness. - *Dono* is for people beneath you. - *Chan* is for children and is close to "dear little." The Japanese choose the most appropriate one for the person they talk to.

The name suffixes make the characters' relationship clear because they show which level of the hierarchy people belong to. Let us consider the case of Yasuhide and Sakaki in the play. Sakaki is sometimes called "Sakaki-no-mae." - *No-mae* is the traditional honorific that is used for a woman of high rank. In the prologue, the scene is set in the capital Court, and Yasuhide calls her "Sakaki-no-mae" because she is a princess. Their relationship is that of servant and master at that time, so Yasuhide calls her "Sakaki-no-mae" with respect for the higher rank person. On the contrary, when their relationship has become that of a husband and a wife, Yasuhide simply calls her "Sakaki." This suggests that Sakaki relegates herself to the rank of peasants in order to be equal with Yasuhide.

The Name suffixes are a convenient means to represent the identities of the characters, but they may seem too alien for Americans. The way of using them is so complicated as to cause misunderstanding in the process of their literal translation from Japanese into English. For example, the Japanese word *Obasan* literally

means “aunt” in English, but it is not necessarily a word to suggest she is someone’s aunt. Japanese usually call a middle-aged woman *Obasan* when she is familiar to them even if she is not a relative. In the play, Yota calls Sakaki *Obasan*, but she is not actually his aunt. In this case, the honorific *Obasan* shows that Yota and Sakaki live in a close relationship as a family. This particular usage of honorifics in Japanese might cause a misunderstanding about the characters’ relationships. Therefore, it is risky to translate each word literally without understanding the context. The translator should be careful about not only correct translation, but also diction and context of the original script.

Despite the difficulties of translation, many name suffixes were adapted in the English script. Then there was a problem that Americans could not understand name suffixes because they are unfamiliar with these honorific words. If the name suffixes appear in a novel, the reader is able to realize their meaning through the translator’s note. On the contrary, a play is a performing art, and it would be difficult for the audience to recognize the meaning of honorifics only by listening to the dialogue. Therefore, in general, the Japanese original name suffixes do not seem appropriate for a play performed in English.

Williams, however, retained these complicated name suffixes in the English script, even though they seemed to be meaningless for the American audiences. She said, “There are a number of original lines that are [practically verbatim]. I have deliberately kept in pieces of text that are strange-sounding and show lovely uses of the language.” It was an attempt to bridge the cultural and language gap and to perform the Japanese play in English. She did not use the name suffixes as tools to clarify the characters relationships, but expected their effects to represent the characters’ identity. She intended that the American actors should represent the Japanese manner by learning characteristic Japanese diction.

The usage of colloquial explanations also caused misunderstandings for the American audience. For example, Jiro is arriving in the capital as an assistant of Syugodai in the epilogue. In the Japanese version, Yasuhide says to Syugodai, “*Yoroshiku onegai shimasu.*” This expression is peculiar to the Japanese diction. “*Yoroshiku onegai shimasu*” literally means, “Please be kind to him” in English. It sounds strange for English native speakers because they would never say such a thing in this situation. The greeting “Please be kind to me” represents the

Japanese self-centered idea. During the process of literal translation, the phrase has changed into appropriate phrases for American audiences such as "Honor his house."

2.2. Rewriting: From Literal English to Understandable English

2.2.1. The Differences of Theatrical Styles

There are many differences between Eastern and Western storytelling. One of the biggest differences is in the ways of developing a story. On one hand, the Western way of storytelling is process-oriented; on the other hand, the Japanese way is ending-oriented. Williams said, "It is common in a Japanese play to have the entire show explained by a minor character at the end, whereas in the West we like to have our mystery unfold throughout the show." In order to create an interesting show for the American audience, some rewriting and adaptation of the original script was required for the performance in English.

The other difference is in the nature of Eastern and Western Theatre. Toshio Kawatake says, "If the Western theatre is described as 'the Literal theatre,' the Eastern theatre is 'the Physical theatre'" (210). Concerning traditional Asian theatre such as Classical Chinese opera and Japanese Kabuki, conventional movements are principally transmitted from master to pupil. These stylized gestures are characteristic of the Japanese theatre. Arnold describes the characteristic comparison of Eastern and Western Theatrical:

Just as text is the domination force in the Western theatre, so gesture is the language of the actor in the Eastern theatre. In the West, the scripts of famous playwrights have been handed down through the centuries, and theatre is largely a verbal, language-based art. In Asian theatre, the gestures, stylized and intricate, convey codes of meaning that can be "read" by an audience just as plainly as we in the West can interpret the actor's speech. (48)

Such a difference in theatrical nature is caused by the cultural gap between the East and West. The Western "Literal theatre" is based on a verbal culture, and the Eastern "Physical theatre" is based on a non-verbal culture. Donahue says that America has a "low-context culture" because of its short history. He explains,

“A nation with such a short history has fewer shared traditions and symbols than do older nations. A wealth of shared traditions and symbols enable people to communicate in shorthand” (170) .

Compared to the American “low context culture,” the Japanese non-verbal communication is affected by its “high-context culture.” For example, there are Japanese phrases such as *ishin-denshin* and *tu-ka*. *Ishin-denshin* refers to a relationship in which people can communicate with each other without saying anything, something that may seem to Americans like telepathy. *Tu-ka* also means that persons understand each other, or it refers to those who are on the same wavelength. These terms suggest that the Japanese unconsciously share the same background with each other. This is one of the Japanese national traits cultivated in its long history.

These cultural differences are reflected in the theatrical styles. In Japanese theatre, for example, intervals of silence in dialogues are considered more important than those in American theatre. Japanese actors, who share the same high-context culture, can perform with feeling even in the moments of silence. There are emotional communications between actors. The audience enjoys them because they also share the same culture and background, thus understand the subtleties of these moments of silence. They are as necessary to complete the play as verbal expressions in Japanese theatre.

However, such gaps in the dialogue may well be incomprehensible for the American audience. They may find it difficult to appreciate the meaning of moments of silence in dialogues because they live in a low-context culture. Moreover, the sources of *Tale of Tsuru* such as *Yuzuru* (The Evening Crane) and *Tsuru-no-ongaeshi* (The Gratitude of the Crane) are traditional fairy tales that are well known in Japan. There is no precise explanation of the background story in the Japanese script because almost everyone in the audience is familiar with these stories. The original Japanese script is not satisfactory for the American audience, even when it is translated into English. Therefore, it is necessary to rewrite the script to overcome the theatrical gap that results from the cultural gap.

2.2.2 Restructuring

In order to “honor the conversation without making the play seem badly written,”

Williams needed structural rewriting in addition to grammatical rewriting of the original Japanese play. She restructured the scenes to make the play more understandable for the American audience.

The Tale of Tsuru has three secrets: the secret of the painting of a frame, the cloth of crane feathers, and the identity of the main character, Sakaki. In the original Japanese script, all of the secrets are revealed by Nagaura, Sakaki's nurse, at the end of the play. It is considered the dramatic denouement in Japan; however, it may seem unnatural or even incomprehensible for an American audience accustomed to the Western style of storytelling in which the secrets are revealed gradually throughout the show.

Williams restructured some scenes in order to make this show satisfactory for American audiences. She divided the final scene in which the secrets are revealed and spread hints in the show from the beginning. For example, the secret of Sakaki's identity is unfolded at the end of the show in the original Japanese version. Then, Williams restructured the play in order to reveal this secret little by little in the English version, and the first hint is already given in the prologue.

In addition, the fact that the human Sakaki became a nun sixteen years ago is revealed at the end of the show in the Japanese script. On the contrary, in the English version, Shogun Tachibana, Sakaki's father, has already ordered the human Sakaki to become a nun in Sumisen Temple when he becomes angry at her for having eloped with Yasuhide. It might have been confusing for American audiences to have the main secret about Sakaki revealed suddenly at the end: there are two Sakakis, one human and the other a crane. Thus, Williams inserted the episode of the human Sakaki in the prologue. Eventually it was a hint for audiences to think about why Sakaki lives in the village with Yasuhide.

For the same reason, the secret of the painting of a flame, that Yasuhide is the very person who has drawn it, was disclosed in Act I Scene one in the English version. Williams inserted a dialogue between Tsubaki-no-kata and Syugodai there.

Shugodai: Mother, I think that's the girl from the drawing! I wonder what her name is?

Tsubaki-no-kata: It would be more important to find out the name of the artist.

Shugodai: You mean —.

Tsubaki-no-kata: It was a drawing of a child, yet it had such life to it. It reminded me of a certain painting. A painting by an artist we would like to find.

Tsubaki-no-kata looks at Jiro's picture and suggests that it resembles the painting of a flame. It has not been revealed yet that Yasuhide drew the painting of a flame, but there is enough information to suggest that he is a key person to unfold the secret.

Moreover, Williams restructured the scene in which Yasuhide falls down. In the Japanese original script, Yasuhide collapses in Scene 1 when he hears the shocking news that the painting of the flame he drew in his youth has been burned. It was an impressive scene to show that Yasuhide was the painter that Shugodai and Tsubaki-no-kata have been looking for. Williams moved this scene from Act I Scene 3 to the end of the act. Originally, the Japanese version was written as a one-act play supposed to be performed in one hour, but the English version is a two-act play with an intermission. Williams moves this dramatic scene in order to place the climax at the end of Act I. Consequently, this restructuring made an impressive ending for Act I and became an effective bridge to Act II.

2.2.3. Insertions

In order to make the play understandable and attractive for the American audience, Williams inserted dialogue and scenes into the literally translated script. These insertions played the important roles of clarifying the character relationships, explaining the nature of each character, and making the story more understandable.

The prologue of the English version became outstandingly different from the Japanese one because a long scene was inserted during the rewriting process. In the original Japanese version, the play starts with a scene in which Yasuhide and Sakaki run away from the Court, followed by the opening song of *Kagome Kagome*. However, Williams inserted several scenes set in the capital before they run off in order to make the prologue more understandable for the American audience.

This insertion helped to clarify the love relationship between Yasuhide and Sakaki. In the Japanese script, there were only Yasuhide's line, "For me, you are everything" and the stage direction, "They embrace each other tightly" before the

scene in which they run off. This was considered such a sudden start of the show that the American audience could not catch up with what was going on the stage. Therefore, Williams inserted several scenes to show their intimate relationship and give a hint in advance about the secrets that would unfold in this play.

This insertion also clarifies the nature of the characters. Especially, the character of Sakaki is portrayed much more clearly in the English version. Sakaki was portrayed as a princess of gentle birth in the Japanese version. She was characterized as a tame, obedient, and repressed woman, drawn according to the stereotyped image of women in medieval Japan. She never expresses her own will and just follows her destiny.

On the contrary, Williams portrayed Sakaki as an independent and active woman in the inserted scene of the English script. For example, when Yasuhide hears that Sakaki will marry, he says, "Then you had better join your husband. He will be waiting —." Then Sakaki retorts, "Why are you so foolish?" Moreover, she clearly declares to him "I love you" and asks "Do you love me or only admire me?" The character of Sakaki has dramatically changed into an energetic and passionate woman through the scene insertions.

The insertion of a family scene was important not only in order to clarify the character's relationships but also to avoid misunderstanding the Japanese way of behavior. One of the largest differences between Japanese and American behavior is the frequency of physical contact. Americans often hug and kiss each other in order to express their closeness. On the contrary, Japanese hardly ever display such physical contact openly. This marked difference can cause misunderstanding about human relationships, especially that between parents and child, in the American audience.

For example, there are some parents and children in the play such as Yasuhide and Jiro (father and son) and Sakaki and Chigusa (mother and daughter). Then it is natural that Americans expect some physical contact between them. However, there are no stage directions in the original Japanese script such as "Yasuhide patted Chigusa's cheek affectingly," "Sakaki embraces Jiro tenderly" or "Yasuhide hugged Jiro." The absence of physical contact is characteristic of the Japanese way of behavior, but it is possible for the American audience to misinterpret. They would think that parents and children in the show do not get

along with each other, especially, Yasuhide and Jiro, who argue with each other about Jiro's future. This conflict may also cause the audience to misunderstand their relationship.

Therefore, Williams needed to insert several scenes in order to represent the bonds in the family. For example, she inserted the scene in which Yasuhide and Jiro have a private talk in Act II Scene 1. Yasuhide allows Jiro to go to capital and be a painter and talks about the time he was Jiro's age. It is a touching scene to represent Yasuhide's and Jiro's trust in and respect for each other.

Williams also inserted a scene to represent Sakaki's love for her daughter, Chigusa. In this scene, Sakaki and Chigusa weave the cloth of crane feathers together. Williams expressed the relationship between mother and daughter very well in the heartwarming dialogue. In this scene, Sakaki and Chigusa talk about love. Sakaki teases her daughter about her boyfriend and Chigusa blushes. Williams succeeded in representing such a peculiar relationship between mother and daughter with understanding of the subtleties of the heart of women.

These insertions are important to avoid misunderstanding by the American audience about family relationships in the play. Instead of using of the American way of expression through physical contact, Williams represented the closeness between parents and children in the dialogue. These inserted scenes eloquently showed the family bond and parents' love for children.

Williams' technical scene-insertion contributed not only to clarifying the plot and the characters' relationships, but also to revealing the dualistic aspect of this play: that is, the existence of a double Sakaki. It was important to suggest to the audience that there are two Sakakis, one human, and the other a crane. This suggestion was helpful to unfold the mystery of this play, "who she really is." In the Japanese version, however, it was unclear that they were different from each other because the "human-Sakaki" was not an impressive character at all. She disappeared from the stage after saying only few lines in the prologue.

On the contrary, she played an important role in the English version. The character of the "human-Sakaki" left the audience with the unforgettable image of an active and powerful Sakaki. It was helpful for the audience to understand that the character that appeared at the beginning of the show is the "human-Sakaki" and that the one called "Sakaki" throughout the show is the "crane-Sakaki."

Williams succeeded in creating the new character, the “human-Sakaki,” who is of course the “dead” character hidden behind the other one, the “crane-Sakaki.” The appearance of both Sakakis on stage, Sasaki as both a human and a crane, made the plot understandable, and moreover enriched the play.

Chapter 3. Direction

Direction is one of the most critical factors of a performance. In the American production of *The Tale of Tsuru*, Williams and the co-director Todd Esperand needed to grasp the theme of the play and to represent the play’s world for the audiences across the gap of language and culture. There were a number of creative aspects of the style of direction in this show. First, I will focus on the feature of movement-based acting of Commedia dell’arte, performance with masks, and use of Japanese behavior that characterizes this performance. Second, I will talk about characteristics of the physical staging of the play. Finally, I will discuss the effects of using elements of Japanese traditional culture such as poems, songs and rituals in this performance.

3.1. Commedia dell’arte

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the style of the Eastern theatre is movement-based, while Western theatre is language-based. Williams understood that movement was an important factor in this show. In their emphasis on movement-based directing, Williams and Esperand taught movement exercises to the actors through rehearsals. The method of these exercises was influenced by the technique of Commedia dell’arte.

Williams and Esperand originally presided over Commedia Zuppa, a performance group of Commedia dell’arte. They create original works using physical theatre, masks, circus, and design and build character masks, and also serve as guest artists. This idea of the movement-based acting in Commedia dell’arte has some similarities with the Japanese traditional artistic theories of Zeami.⁵⁾ He clearly affirmed and explained the important aspects of the theatre.

First, Zeami attached great importance to the audience that witnessed a performance; second, he laid a particular emphasis on the actor’s mental and physical acting among the diverse elements that constitute

the theater; third, he gave a high place to stylization in acting.
(Yamazaki, xxx)

Williams focuses on gesture and movement as the approach to directing a play and consequently adopted these features of Japanese theatre as physically stylized acting in the American production. This movement-based direction is effective to represent the characteristic world of Japanese theatre. Therefore, the actors have various techniques to perform with eloquent movements. It is effective for actors to cultivate their ability to portray characters through gesture and movement rather than merely through words.

According to Oreglia, the Commedia dell'arte is "a constellation of characters and improvisation" (xii). Of course, there are no Commedia dell'arte characters such as Harlequin and Brighella in *The Tale of Tsuru*. However, there are typical characters in this play such as minor roles that are performed with masks. They were typically personalized as a tomboy, a nosy woman, and innocent old men. They were not complicated characters of depth like the other main roles, but actors portray them with great individuality through the fresh action cultivated with the physical training with masks.

About improvisation, Oreglia says, "what was most needful to a comedian of the *Improvvisa* was the peculiar theatrical intuition which enabled to know how to support or feed, whether by words or by actions, the other actors in the drama" (12). This idea was connected with the goal of movement-based performance. In the process of the rehearsals, for example, actors practiced "Contact Improvisation," a physical exercise aimed at achieving both a physical and a mental sense of connection between actors. It was performed without the voice, so actors could focus on body contact. Actors acquired substantial ability to communicate with each other throughout this movement-based practice. Because this common experience knitted the actors together, they were neither confused nor embarrassed, even though they had to play several characters in the performance.

From these points of view, the performance style of Commedia dell'arte was effective to represent the Japanese play. The features of typical characters and improvisation had a great influence on the directing of this cross-cultural performance of *The Tale of Tsuru*. Commedia dell'arte techniques helped to realize the style of the Japanese theatre, which is a movement-based performing art.

3.2. Masks

The use of masks was one of the most important characteristics of our performance of *The Tale of Tsuru*. The idea of using masks also came from the techniques of Commedia dell'arte. In the Japanese theatre, masks have been traditionally used in the performance of Nō and Kyogen. The similarity of using masks contributed to the success of this cross-cultural performance. For example, masks played an important role by allowing double casting, transgender casting, and transcendental casting. In addition, masks contributed to the movement-based performance. It is an effective way of directing in this cross-cultural performance. Masks contributed to the success of the play because they opened up possibilities of casting and acting.



Picture 1: "Actors wearing masks"

3.2.1. The Contribution of the Use of Masks to Casting

One of the values of masks was expanding the contribution of casting. In the American production, all minor characters were played by actors wearing masks. Only the main characters such as Yasuhide, Sakaki, Chigusa, Jiro, Yota and Shugodai were played without masks. Except for these main characters, fourteen actors performed twenty-six different characters. In this section, I will discuss the three features of masks such as double casting, transgender casting, and transcendental casting.

Double casting made it possible for one actor to play two completely different characters. The use of masks sometimes made it possible for actors to play three or even more roles. For example, I performed three characters in the play by changing between two different masks.⁶⁾ I wore a mask with a smiling face to play the village woman, Ayame, and a neutral mask for a Tree Spirit. And I played Tsubaki-no-kata, a mother of village administrator, without a mask. In Act, I had a quick change from Ayame to Tsubaki-no-kata in a minute. In every performance, it was a big challenge for me to change characters quickly, but masks helped make it possible. Besides, the quick change with masks was helpful for audiences. Even when the same actor played several roles in a short time, the change of masks clearly shows the audience that they are different characters.

In addition, masks enabled different actors to play the same role in one show. For example, Katie Foland played both Nagaura and Matsugae in the show. However, she could not play both characters when Nagaura and Matsugae simultaneously appear on stage in Act II, Scene 5. Therefore, the actor playing Tree Spirit 3 appeared in Nagaura's costume and mask instead of her. Masks characterized the feature of each character, so it was possible for different actors to play the same role.

Transgender casting was also enabled by the use of masks, for example, allowing a male actor to play a female role. A male actor, Brian Wilson, played the female role Kaede by wearing a mask. Though it was not especially a mask with a female face, he could portray the nosy but charming village woman. In the pamphlet for the production, "Who's Who in *The Tale of Tsuru*," he wrote, "Thanks to the family and Aunt Ila for inspiration for Kaede!" Later, he explained to me, "I imitate my aunt because her character is the same as a woman in my image. She

inspires me to create the gestures of my characters.” It might be possible to play a female role only by changing voice and behavior; however, actors were able to cross the gender gap more easily with masks. Masks were effective tools not only to change the actors’ faces but also their hearts.

Transcendental casting succeeded through the mask’s anonymity that expands the possibilities of acting. The anonymous nature of the masks was effective for the actor to play imaginary or non-human characters such as fairies, trees, and animals. For example, the masks enabled actors to perform the roles of Tree Sprits, which were non-human characters. The masks used in depicting the Tree Spirits were gold and neutral without expression. Therefore, actors could effectively play Tree Spirits with these masks with an air of mystery on the stage.

Because of these features of masks, the possibilities of casting were dramatically expanded. It was much more flexible for actors to play the roles by wearing masks. Masks realized complex casting while avoiding confusion in the audience. Besides, the audience could have fun at a show with masks because masks enriched the quality of performance. Masks served in the performance as both a practical and an amusement device.



Picture 2: “Actors play Tree Spirits with masks”

3.2.2. Masks' Contribution to Acting

Another value of masks was expanding the contribution of acting, especially movement-based acting. It was important to realize this aspect of performance in order to imitate the theatrical style of the Japan, which focuses on gesture and movement. Therefore, the directors adopted movement exercises in which actors could learn how to move on the stage as characters.

The exercise consisted of eight efforts based on the work of Rudolf Laban: Wring, Press, Glide, Float, Flick, Dab, Punch, and Slash. Each effort was characterized by the factors of Direction (direct or indirect), Weight (heavy or light), Speed (sustained or quick) and Flow (bound or free). For example, an actor instructed to move as "Wring" moved indirectly, heavy, sustained, and bound. Throughout the rehearsals, actors repeated this practice to train their locomotive power and sense of movement.

When this exercise of eight efforts was practiced with masks, the actors first picked up a mask and stared at it for a while. While staring at the masks, they use their imagination in order to find the most suitable movement suitable for their masks. Actors began to move when they found the particular movement for their mask. Thus it was important for actors to represent the personalities of masks by movement.

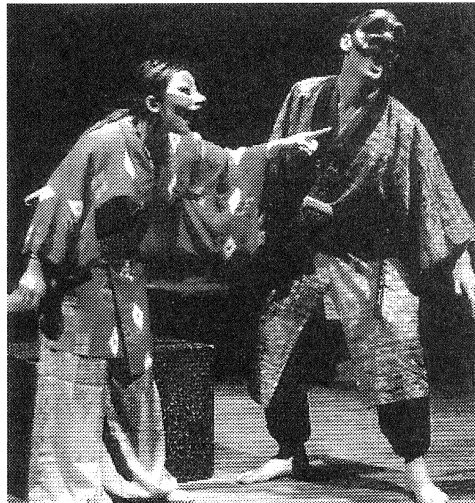
This practice contributed to the representation of the Japanese style of movement-oriented performance. In this way of directing, movements are the first step of interpretation; that is to say, movements personify the characters. Actors derive the inspiration from gestures and movements when they portrayed the personalities of characters. As an example of the relationship between movement and characters, there were characters such as Meishu (village headman) and his wife Okaka in *The Tale of Tsuru*. They were a couple and often appear on the stage together, but their personalities were opposite: Meishu was sheepish and easygoing, while Okaka was tough and hot-tempered.

In this case, it was effective to represent the difference of characters by movement. For example, an actor playing Meishu imagined the movement of the character at first. Then he would find some appropriate movement for the character. Meishu was a sheepish and easygoing character, so that the effort could be "Glide" (direct, light, sustained and free). On the contrary, an actor playing Okaka could

decide the type of movement depending on her own image. Then, if the effort of Okaka was “Slash” (indirect, heavy, quick and free), it was very effective because the opposite movements of “Glide” and “Slash” showed the contrast between Meishu and Okaka. The movements played an important role to show not only each character’s personality, but also the relationship between characters.

The emphasis on movement was opposite to the general process of portraying characters in the literal-oriented Western theatre. In the Western theatre it is common for actors to read the script first and then portray the personalities of characters. As represented by the Stanislavski method, the popular way of directing in the Western theatre is to draw out realistic acting depending on the internal feelings of the actors.

On the contrary, movement individualized the character in the performance with masks. The expression of the masks inspired the actors, and they found the character through movement. Actors chose the appropriate movement for their roles from among the various experiments they had tried in rehearsal. This method was appropriate for this Japanese play performed by American actors because it contributed to a movement-based performance.



Picture 3: Okaka (left) and Meishu (right) in *The Tale of Tsuru*

3.3. Japanese Ways of Behavior

In addition to adapting the appropriate method as Commedia dell'arte techniques and masks, the directors had to deal with the Japanese ways of behavior in rehearsal. Naturally, the Japanese and American ways of behavior are quite different. Therefore, the directors had to point out the differences and teach actors how to behave in a more Japanese manner. For example, Williams said, "Japanese parents don't kiss their children, so how do we express parental love so that Western audiences don't find (the parents) cold and unloving?"

As she said, Japanese rarely hug and kiss even if they are very close as parents and children and long-term friends. Especially, since *The Tale of Tsuru* took place in the fifteenth century, the people would hardly have physical contact with each other in public. Then, it was a problem for actors to show American audiences the love of parents toward their children without physical contact. As mentioned previously, Act II Scene 1 was inserted in order to represent the bond of Yasuhide and Jiro. The dialogue showed their good relationship sufficiently, and there is a stage direction, "*Jiro bows to Yasuhide.*"

In the American production, Williams directed actors to use the gesture of bowing. Originally, a bow was a gesture to represent respect for others. However, it was also used to show the special feelings of love, trust, friendship and brotherhood in the American production. For example, Jiro bows to Yasuhide when he leaves for the capital, and this bow expresses his love for and gratitude to his father. At the end of Act II Scene 2, Meishu and Sakaki also bow to each other after saying goodnight. It is an impressive scene to represent friendship of Meishu and Sakaki. Meishu senses that Sakaki will leave the village and becomes sentimental.

Meishu: Thank you. For giving my friend so much happiness. You left
so much behind — all that you were born for.

Sakaki: I was born to be the wife of Yasuhide, to be a woman of
Minazuru. How I love this village!

Meishu: I hope you will never have to leave us.

Sakaki: I must go and get the children to bed. It's very late.

Meishu: Goodnight.

Sakaki: Goodnight, Meishu-sama.

In the first rehearsal of this scene, actors embraced each other while saying

goodnight. However, it would be very unnatural for Japanese characters to embrace in this situation, even if they were close friends. Although we hesitated about which way to choose, eventually it was decided to have the actors behave more like Japanese here. Therefore, Meishu and Sakaki bow to each other instead of embracing. However, it was a challenge for the director to represent sensitive feelings with such limited gestures as a simple bow. At the same time, it was also a big challenge for actors to express their feelings without using familiar American gestures and movements. Williams said, "It is really challenging for the actors to flesh out characters from implication within the language. The characters say much more than Japanese characters would, but far less than Americans, so there is a lot to play with in the space between the words."

3.4. Staging

Staging was also an important part of direction. In the performance of *The Tale of Tsuru*, the directors tried to create the best style of staging to depict the play's world. The staging included characteristics of the stadium-style stage and a simplified stage. The stadium-style stage effectively increased the possibilities of actors to create and represent eloquent expression. Also this stage represented the Japanese quality of "elegant simplicity." The styles of staging contributed to the expression of the Japanese spirit of this show and left a special impression on the American audience.

3.4.1. Stadium-style stage

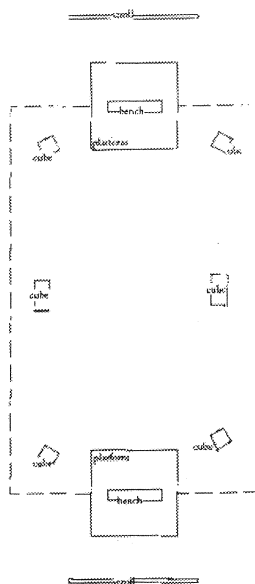
The Tale of Tsuru was performed in the Multiform Theatre in Western Michigan University. It is called a black box, which is a flexible theatre where the stage space and the configuration of the audience space can be changed from production to production. The figure of the stage is stadium-style, which is set in the middle of the black box theatre, and audiences sat on two sides of the rectangular stage. This stadium-style stage enabled actors to achieve eloquent expression and contributed to the success of this movement-oriented performance.

There were two main advantages of the stadium-style stage. One was that there are few blind spots on the stage for the audience. Different from the proscenium or the thrust stage, the stadium-style stage allowed audiences to see the stage from a

full 360 degrees.

Another advantage was that there are few limits of blocking. Since there were no blind spots for the audience, the actors were free to use the space expansively. Moreover, there were not only stage right and stage left as on the usual stage, but also each corner of the stage could be an entrance in the stadium-style stage. Consequently, the stadium-style stage enabled directors to expand the possibilities of blocking. For example, Williams often said to actors, “Move diagonally” in the rehearsals. Audiences could watch the stage from both sides, so it did not matter if actors walked diagonally across the stage or ran back and forth on the stage.

On the contrary, there were also disadvantages of the stadium-style stage. For example, it was sometimes hard for audiences to hear the voices when actors turned their backs on them. Actors have to pay more attention to the audience on the stadium-style stage than they would on a standard, proscenium stage. They have to play in a louder voice and act with more expressive gestures in order to make use of the stadium-style stage.



Picture 4: “Stadium style – stage”

Taking into account both positive and negative features, it seems that the stadium-style stage was effective for actors to create and represent eloquent expression. They could act on the stage, free from restraints of movement. The stadium-style stage was also one of the most important factors to contribute to the success of this performance.

3.4.2. Simplified Stage

In this performance, the stage was abstract and simple. Kondo, the playwright of the original Japanese script, answered my question, "what did you intend to show the American audience through this play?" She said, "I wanted to represent 'the Japanese elegant simplicity' in order to give a great impact for the American audience, which is understandable at a glance." Williams was proud of retaining "an inherently Japanese sensibility" as much as possible in the stage of the American production. It contributed to the success of this performance that directors, actors, and members of the theater staff understood and realized the Japanese spirit of this play.

In the American production, there were no special sets except for six black boxes on the stage. The floor was blocked by one-foot squares and painted gold. This simplified stage reminded me of the Rock garden of Ryoan-ji Temple in Kyoto, Japan. This Zen garden is famous for its simplicity, and the black boxes on the plain stage seem like rocks in that garden. This complete simplicity of the stage contributed to the expression of one aspect of the Japanese spirit.

According to the introduction of *Japanese Gardens*, "the beauty of Japanese gardens is based on a fundamental paradox: complex rules of composition and symbolism have been applied to create an effect of apparent naturalness and simplicity" (1). On the stage, black boxes were used as chairs, stools, platforms and hills. There were actually "complex rules of composition and symbolism" when actors move them to the appropriate place in each scene. At the same time, black boxes harmonized well with the stage and contributed to the "naturalness and simplicity" of the stage.

The other feature of this stage which showed simplicity in design was the use of scrolls. Williams used shadow screens in order to show "the Japanese elegant simplicity." It was one of the most representative stage effects in this show. In the

American production, two big scrolls were set as screens on both short sides of the rectangular stage. The screens were used in Act II Scene 4, the scene in which the shadow of Chigusa turns into a crane. The trick is that Chigusa, who was in front of the scroll, and another actor standing behind the scroll simultaneously spread their arms wide. Then an actor was lighted from behind, and her shadow was reflected on the scroll. It represented the figure of a shadow as if it were a crane.

There were no sophisticated stage effects as in realistic theatre in this performance, but black boxes and scrolls effectively showed "the Japanese elegant simplicity" on the stage. They contributed to express the Japanese spirit of this show and to leave a quiet but vivid impression on the American audience.



Picture 5: "The trick with scroll. Chigusa turns into a crane"

3.5. Japanese Traditional Culture

In *The Tale of Tsuru*, various elements of Japanese traditional culture were used effectively. Williams said, "I have deliberately kept in pieces of text that are strange-sounding and show lovely uses of the language." In this section, I will introduce Japanese poems, songs and ceremonies and consider how they affected this performance.

3.5.1. Japanese Poems: Haiku

A haiku is a traditional Japanese poem that has 17 syllables written in a pattern of 5-7-5 syllables, including a word indicating the season. It is practiced internationally now and quite familiar to Americans through translation. Originally, there were no haiku poems in the Japanese script of *The Tale of Tsuru*, but Williams added them to the English version. She used them to show a characteristic means of Japanese expression.

In the performance, Tree Spirits entered to recite haiku at the beginning or the end of some scenes. When a couple of Tree Spirits appeared on the stage, they wore neutral masks and held cherry blossom branches. They appeared on the stage as narrators and solemnly and slowly recited poems alone or together.

At the beginning of Act II Scene 3, three Tree Spirits recited a haiku by Matsuo Basho, a Japanese poet who perfected the haiku form.

How will you manage
To cross alone
The autumn mountain
Which was so hard to climb
Even when we the two of us were together?

This haiku not only represents Japanese poetic diction, but also suggests the feeling of a character. After a Tree Spirit narrates this poem, there is a scene between Sakaki and Chigusa. Chigusa tries to weave a cloth of crane feathers to help Shugodai and save the village. However, Sakaki worries that her daughter is pushing herself too hard. Sakaki expects it is impossible for Chigusa because only the crane-Sakaki can manage to weave it.

In addition to the use of famous Japanese poems, an original haiku is also inserted into the English script. In Act II Scene 4, Yasuhide agonizes because he

can not draw as powerful a picture as Jiro does. Then Tsubaki-no-kata asks him whether he will be able to draw a picture if he can see a big flame. Yasuhide is excited to hear that and agrees with her. Finally, Tsubaki-no-kata lights Jiro's picture with a lantern and sets fire to the house. After this scene, a Tree Spirit recites an original Haiku poem as a proverb.

A red and yellow flower
Lives without body
Eats without stomach
Its hunger is never satisfied

This poem represents human greed for their foolish desires. In this performance, haiku were used effectively to develop the story and express the character's feelings in addition to representing the Japanese poetic diction.

3.5.2. Songs

Japanese songs were an important factor in *The Tale of Tsuru*. In the original script, the playwright Kondo introduced four Japanese traditional songs, such as *Kagome Kagome*, *Kokiriko-bushi*, *Chin-Chin Chidori*, and *Narayama*. These songs were sung both in Japanese and English in the American production.⁷⁾

Japanese songs played important roles in the performance. The lyrics represented Japanese diction, and the melodies contributed to creating the Japanese atmosphere of the show. Besides, they were effective to draw the attention of the audience. The legitimate theatre tended to dullness because it was hard for audience to concentrate on the stage for hours. It needed some effects to draw them back to the play's world again. Japanese songs were effective to change the mood and get the attention of audiences who are interested in unfamiliar songs.

In the opening scene, actors as Tree Spirits appeared on the stage singing *Kagome, Kagome*, a Japanese traditional circle game with one person in the middle. First, the Tree Spirits sung it slowly and mysteriously in Japanese in the wings. Then, they suddenly appeared on the stage and sung it both in Japanese and English. This direction with Japanese songs succeeded because an exotic Japanese song catches the attention of American audiences. The show needed a great impact at the opening to attract the attention of the audience.

In addition to the opening scene, Yota sung Japanese traditional songs as

Kokiriko, *Chin-Chin Chidori*, and *Narayama* throughout the show. Kevin Feldt, who played Yota, sang *Kokiriko* and *Chin-Chin Chidori* in Japanese. They were translated into English at first but the English lyrics did not match the melodies. Feldt then practiced singing them in Japanese. Consequently, he sang them in perfect Japanese and attracted the attention of the audience very well. His songs had a great impact, and they eloquently conveyed the atmosphere of Japanese traditional culture.

3.5.3. Rituals

Japanese traditions of festival and ritual were effectively introduced in the American production of *The Tale of Tsuru*. Japanese traditional events such as *Shyoryonagashi* (the floating of lanterns on the water) characterized the show by representing the originality of Japanese culture.

In the production pamphlet of *The Tale of Tsuru*, Williams and Esperand explained the tradition of *Shyoryonagashi* in the essay, "From the Directors."

In the late summer, Japanese families welcome back their ancestors' souls with a festival of dancing, feasting and family visits. The souls are then sent back to their world with lanterns floating on the water, the light from which guides the souls on their journey.(21)

In addition to the directors' comments on Tree Spirits, it was explained what *Shyoryonagashi* meant in the show. At the end of Act I Scene 4, Tree Spirits appeared on the stage and introduce it to the audience.

Tree Spirit 6: *Shyoryonagashi*.

Tree Spirit 4: Each year, paper lanterns are made, one for each ancestor.

Tree Spirit 6: After a festival of music and dancing, the lanterns are put on the river.

Tree Spirit 4: The lanterns shine, throwing pictures on the surface of the water.

Tree Spirit 6: And as they drift away, the spirits of the ancestors are guided to their world by the gentle flames.

Act II started with *Shyoryonagashi*. It was one of the most impressive scenes of this play. In the American production, the lanterns were floating on a river made of

a long blue cloth. This cloth river actually floated slowly because it was pulled by the stagehands dressed in black like the *kuroko*, stage assistants of Kabuki. When villagers put the lanterns on the river, they prayed for their ancestors both in English and Japanese. It was beautiful to see the lanterns gleaming in the darkness, and the ritual prayers created an atmosphere of mystery.

Shyoryonagashi is an unfamiliar ritual not only for Americans but also for many Japanese these days. However, the directors decided to incorporate this Japanese ritual into the show. It was a big challenge for them to do so, but they succeeded quite well.



Picture 6: “Shyoryonagashi: Villagers put the lanterns on the river”

Conclusion

When I first heard that American students were going to perform the Japanese traditional play *The Tale of Tsuru*, I was uncertain whether it would be possible because I knew how difficult it is to perform foreign plays across the gap of

language and culture. However, the performance succeeded as a result of the use of an appropriate script and talented directing.

Williams, the playwright of the English script, created an original work without diminishing the thematic spirit of the original Japanese script. She rewrote the original script by restructuring and inserting scenes and dialogue into a literal translation. Therefore, the play became understandable and attractive for American audiences without diminishing the value of the original version.

In addition, the directors successfully used gestures and movement in the performance in order to represent the Japanese way of movement-based acting. They focused on gestures and movements thorough the technique of Commedia dell'arte and masks. It was effective to convey some of the characteristics of Japanese theatre.

Moreover, they introduced aspects of Japanese traditional culture in order to create this performance. Japanese haiku poems, songs and rituals represented some features of the Japanese quality of "elegant simplicity." It had a great impact on the American audience.

The success of *The Tale of Tsuru* expands the possibilities of realizing performances across the gap of the language and culture. It demonstrated that a cross-cultural performance could achieve the goal that audiences enjoy it as much as domestic plays. Then, it is important to work on achieving the most appropriate translation, directing, and acting. Besides, the most important thing is that the directors, actors, and other staff members of the theater create an original work while respecting the original play. In the American production of *The Tale of Tsuru*, they can succeed in realizing a creative and original performance with the essence of the original play. Consequently, they can not only please audiences, but also will be happy with what they have done and feel that they have been quite successful.

Notes

- 1) It is different from *Yuzuru* (The Evening Crane) written by Junji Kinoshita, the famous story about the crane transformed into a woman. *The Tale of Tsuru* is an original story written by Michiko Kondo. Whereas Kinoshita's *Yuzuru* has "the themes of self-sacrifice and the

struggle between spiritual values and materialism" (Britton and Hayashida. 58), *The Tale of Tsuru* is very much about desire: what we want may not be what we need.

In a pamphlet of *The Tale of Tsuru*, Williams and Esperand introduce the story and background of this show.

The Tale of Tsuru is set in 15th century Japan, in the Muromachi period. At this time, the nobles and the court had power in name only while the shoguns and samurai had both control and states. The samurai fought over land in the capital, burning and looting, while the provincial farms often lay in ruins from war and neglect. These battles were called the Wars of Onin.

The fairy tale of the crane is older than the Wars of Onin and as well as well known in Japan as Cinderella is here in America. In folk tales and songs, *Tsuru no Ongaeshi* (The Gratitude of the Crane) is part of the Japanese tradition of living in harmony with nature. The story tells of an injured crane rescued by a human. The crane weaves a beautiful cloth of her feather to thank the human for his kindness. This adaptation is based on Michiko Kondo's modern retelling of the classic tale.

In Japan today, the crane is still a symbol of longevity and good fortunes, and images of cranes are widely used as decoration for auspicious occasion. *Sembazuru* are chains of 1000 paper cranes to receive good fortune or a wish. During rehearsals, the cast folded more than 2500 paper cranes which we now share with you as a wish for your good fortune and to express our gratitude for sharing this performance with you.

- 2) *Kudzuno-ha* is also called *Ashiya Doman Ohuchi Kagami*. The heroin's name "Sakaki" in *The Tale of Tsuru* is the namesake of Sakaki who is a heroin of *Kudzuno-ha*. Sakaki means "sacred tree" in English. Originally, a heroin of *Kudzuno-ha* is an incarnation of a vixen, but Kondo heard the news folded paper cranes are popular in the U.S.A. and changed it to a crane.
- 3) The name of a painter "Yasuhide" in *The Tale of Tsuru* comes from the name of a painter "Yoshihide" in *Jigokuhen*.
- 4) *The Tale of Tsuru* had been performed from March 24 to 31, 2001 at the Multiform Theatre in the Irving and Guilmore Theatre Complex in WMU.
- 5) Zeami is a genius at his art, as actor, dancer, playwright and producer of a traditional Japanese theatre of *Nō*.
- 6) Actors wear half-masks, which uncover the part of mouth.
- 7) In the American production, only Narayama is sung in English. Feldt sat a poem translated into English to music. It sounded blues with melancholy melody and got along with the scene very well.

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